The rapid growth of public opinion polling over the past three decades and the increasing use of polls by politicians suggest that the public voice is being considered more frequently than in the past. Some applaud the increased use of public opinion polls as evidence that democracy is working. Others decry the use of polls as a simplistic representation of the public voice because they misrepresent what the public really thinks. Yet, surprisingly, there has never been a forum such as this that simultaneously examines both sides of the public opinion/policymaking divide, despite its obvious importance for democratic theory.

This conference will bring together researchers, pollsters, journalists, and politicians to consider these issues. They will explore interrelationships among polls and public opinion, policymakers, the mass media, and policy outcomes. Among the questions to be answered: Do polls accurately measure public opinion? Do polls drive policymakers’ decisions? Under what circumstances do policymakers ignore or even seek to manipulate public opinion? What is the nature of the relationship between polls, public opinion, and public policy?
Conference on Polls, Policy, and the Future of American Democracy
May 13, 2000, Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University

8:30 Registration (Room 1E, Norris Center, Northwestern University, Evanston Campus)

8:45 Welcome Fay Lomax Cook, Director, Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University

9:00 Panel I: What Do Polls Reveal about Public Opinion and What Can They Reveal?
Moderator: Dennis Chong, Department of Political Science, Northwestern University
Speakers: Charles F. Manski, Department of Economics, Northwestern University
Martin Gilens, Department of Political Science, Yale University
Commentators: Scott Althaus, Speech Communication & Political Science, University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana
Peter Miller, Department of Communication Studies, Northwestern University

10:30 Break

10:45 Panel II: Do Politicians Pander to the Public?
Moderator: Jeff Manza, Department of Sociology, Northwestern University
Speakers: Lawrence R. Jacobs, Department of Political Science, University of Minnesota
James Stimson, Department of Political Science, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill
Commentators: G. William Domhoff, Department of Psychology, University of California, Santa Cruz

12:15 Lunch and Keynote Addresses
Senator Richard J. “Dick” Durbin, U.S. Senator (D-Illinois) (invited but not confirmed)
William Schneider, Senior Political Analyst, CNN

1:45 Panel III: Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy
Moderator: Kenneth W. Abbott, School of Law, Northwestern University
Speakers: Steven Kull, Center on Policy Attitudes, University of Maryland
Robert Y. Shapiro, Department of Political Science, Columbia University
Commentators: Richard C. Longworth, Chicago Tribune
Amy Searight, Department of Political Science, Northwestern University

3:15 Break

3:30 Panel IV: Public Opinion and Social Welfare Policy
Moderator: Craig L. LaMay, Medill School of Journalism, Northwestern University
Speakers: Fay Lomax Cook, School of Education and Social Policy, Northwestern University
Paul Burstein, Department of Sociology, University of Washington
Commentators: Jack C. Doppelt, Medill School of Journalism, Northwestern University
David Axelrod, President, Axelrod & Associates

5:00 Closing Address: “The Role of Public Opinion Polls in Promoting Democracy and Good Government: A Look Around the World”
Humphrey Taylor, Chairman, The Harris Poll, Harris Interactive

5:30 Rapporteur: Benjamin I. Page, Department of Political Science, Northwestern University

Registration Form

☐ Yes, I will attend the conference. Please reserve a place for me.
☐ I will need information about hotels.
Name__________________________________________________________
Organization or School_______________________________________________
Address________________________________________________________________
City______________ State______ Zip_______ Phone_________________ Email__________________________________

Note: Conference will be held in Room 1E, Norris Center, 1999 S. Campus Drive, Evanston Campus, Northwestern University
Space is limited. If you wish to attend, please respond by May 1, 2000. You may fax your registration to 847-491-9916.

For more information contact:
Audrey Chambers
Conference Coordinator
IPR, Northwestern University
2040 Sheridan Road
Evanston, IL 60208-4100
Phone: 847-491-8712
Email: achambers@nwu.edu
Fax: 847-491-9916